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AUTHOR Dufrene, Phoebe
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ABSTRACT

The U.S. population of European ancestry is shifting toward a population of Hispanic and African origin. For this reason art education needs to have a multicultural cross-cultural foundation. University professors must prepare future art teachers to confront a more diverse population through relevant art history, aesthetics, and art criticism coursework. Preparation for students should begin before the final year in college, and should include a review of literature pertinent to multicultural cross-cultural art education. The development of research methods that focus on the sociocultural context in which art is produced is also important. To fully develop balanced teacher preparation materials, art education professors must work closely with art history professors and art library personnel. Additionally, a more subjective approach is needed. Students and faculty must share their personal feelings about groups outside their respective cultures, because confronting attitudes is necessary in order for changes to occur. (KM)

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Resistance to Multicultural Art Education: Strategies for Multicultural Faculty Working in Predominantly White Teacher Education Programs

Dr. Phoebe Dufrene
Assistant Professor of Art and Design

Purdue University
Creative Arts #1
West Lafayette, IN 47907

SO 022 013

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Resistance to Multicultural Art Education:

Strategies for Multicultural Faculty

Working in Predominantly White Teacher

Education Programs

Introduction

In a 1989 speech given at Purdue University, Henry Cisneros, former San Antonio mayor and current Chairman and CEO of Cisneros Asset Management Co., discussed population demographics that will affect future U.S. classrooms. More than half of the U.S. population growth in the next two decades will come from diverse ethnic populations. The population of Americans with European ancestry will decline at an accelerating rate. Hispanics comprise 40% of the immigrant population and Asians comprise another 40% (Lee & Richardson, 1991).

Inquiry into issues affecting the multicultural classroom are once again being renewed because of the above mentioned migration patterns. Since some of the most crucial problems facing U.S. educators and students are caused by cultural and racial misunderstandings, the universality of artistic expression can be a vehicle for multicultural dialogue (Dufrene, 1990). Art education philosophical inquiry must now, more than ever, have a multicultural/cross-cultural basis. Currently, multicultural and cross-cultural aesthetic examples are given minimal representations in art text books, state curriculum guides, and art education methods courses.

Lucy Lippard, a white feminist art historian/critic, writes of a new globally inclusive curriculum that treats "Western civilization as one of many worth studying in a multicultural nation, where white students will be encouraged to see themselves as simply another Other".[1] Superficial overviews of Asian, African, and Pre-Columbian art are included in introductory art history courses. However few university art courses acknowledge the Third World's contribution to Western culture or treat these civilizations as cultural equals (Lippard, 1990).

[1]Lippard, L. (1990). Mixed blessings: New art in a multicultural America. New York: Pantheon Books, p. 23

In my role as a university art education professor with a multicultural family history, I try to prepare my 100% white student art teachers for America's future multicultural classrooms. Because Indiana is ranked 35th out of the 50 states for multicultural populations, it is a challenge to convince my students that the demographic structure of the U.S. classroom is really changing. This paper will address some of that resistance.

Background

During my appointment at Purdue University I have been reading extensively on Native American art and culture, contemporary art and culture from other diverse non-Western traditions, feminist art criticism, and art education issues affecting the international art community. In addition I have published and given lectures on multicultural art issues at national and international conferences. Investigation and contemplation of these matters has focused upon applications for the K-12 art classrooms and university art education.

But perhaps my greatest contribution to teacher preparation in multicultural art education is my personal experience as an artist of color. Growing up in a family of artists that uses our Native American (Powhatan) heritage for artistic inspiration and intermarriages with other nationalities (Asian & Caribbean) for international understanding, it has always been easy for me to identify with art from various cultures. Unlike many North American professors for whom multiculturalism is an intellectual exercise, for me it has always been a way of life.

Although this is my third year supervising a class of 100% white student teachers, it is still a culture shock to enter the room on the first day of class. It is a two way cultural shock because many of my students come from rural Indiana and have never had a personal encounter with someone of a different race until attending Purdue. Their only previous exposure to other races has been from the media.

This is the third year that I have asked student teachers to prepare slide packets that include artists of color (male and female) and Western women artists. Once again I'm faced with a class that has never been exposed to Native American artists such as Jaune Quick-To-See Smith, Jimmie Durham,

Harry Fonesca, George Longfish, Fritz Scholder, or T. C. Cannon; African-American women artists such as Faith Ringgold, Betye Saar, or Elizabeth Catlett; Mexican artists like Frida Kahlo, Rufino Tamayo, or Diego Rivera, and culturally mixed artists such as Wilfredo Lam (Cuban-Chinese-Mulatto) and Isamu Noguchi (Japanese-Anglo-Native American). The six weeks senior student teaching seminar does not offer enough time to compensate for four years of male Eurocentric art education. The result is frustration on my part and resistance from students who think multicultural art is not relevant in Indiana.

Consistently the male students have been the most receptive to collecting slides from non-Western artists (male and female) and the females have been mainly interested in white European and American artists. Hispanic-American, Asian-American, African-American, and Native-American women artists are not perceived as "women artists". Relationships between women artists of color and the white feminist art movement have not always been cordial. Racism and classism within the feminist art movement is a reality that is often ignored (Goldman, 1988).

Many art education students do not realize that contemporary Third World artists not discussed in U.S. university art courses may be internationally recognized and acclaimed in Europe or Latin America. With this lack of personal exposure it is difficult for them to plan art education curricula that is globally inclusive. What will these future art teachers do when confronted with a class of Hispanic, Asian, or Caribbean immigrants? Will they be able to introduce aesthetics, criticism, and art history that is relevant for diverse populations? Exclusionary policies based on disinterest result in distorted views of art in general, and the breadth of art from the Americans in particular (Goldman, 1988).

Strategies

To overcome student resistance to the facts of the changing population demographics and the necessity to develop more multicultural art education curricula, it is necessary to adequately prepare them before the senior year teaching experience. Preparation should include a review of the literature

pertinent to multicultural/cross-cultural art education. Readings should include research from the 60's to the present that examines topics, discussions, and conclusions which may be adopted for use in art curricula.

Also important is the development of research methods that focus on the sociocultural context in which art is produced. Ethnographic investigation involves an examination of the structures relevant to the production and use of art within a cultural context. Similarities and differences between the arts in various cultures are analyzed through social, political, and economic systems.

As a way of understanding art outside our own culture, art historian Arnold Rubin offered three universal areas that delineate the ways art functions in a society. The areas include the establishment and proclamation of individual and group identity; a didactic system linking generations in shared beliefs and behaviors; and the technology by which people relate to their environment and secure their survival (Dufrene, 1991). According to Rubin's theory art from all cultures possesses three properties: material, motif, and workmanship. In his book, Art as Technology: The Arts of Africa, Oceania, Native America, Southern California, art from various cultures is labeled by geographic areas instead of the usually derogatory terminology such as "savage" or "primitive".

Implementing these strategies for a more culturally diverse art history, aesthetics, and criticism is beyond the limits of most art education methods courses. To fully develop balanced teacher preparation materials art education professors must work closely with art history professors and art library personnel. Professionals in other art disciplines must be willing to broaden the canon.

To complement the objective, scholarly research necessary for art teacher preparation, a more personal approach is also needed. This can involve faculty and students honestly sharing their personal feelings about groups outside of their respective cultures, sharing thoughts most group members from their particular culture feel about "outsiders", bringing in art objects from their personal collections, and establishing friendships with people from different races, religions, and countries.

I will never forget my first year at Purdue when a student teacher told the class that white Americans were an "endangered species" and would have a hard time getting teaching positions

because "minorities get all the good teaching jobs now." The previous semester the student had an African instructor. Having me the following semester may have been overwhelming. Until feelings like that are resolved, multicultural/cross-cultural art education will continue to be a conference theme instead of a curriculum.

Conclusion

One way for art students to explore their feelings concerning racism, sexism, or other "isms" is to use the creative process. In the context of the political, economic, and social changes taking place since the Civil Rights movement, artists of color have used their art as vehicles of political protest (Sims, 1988). Sims, a female African-American art curator, has been documenting the ways performance art is used to connect black, feminist, and social issues.

Black feminist writer Bell Hooks thinks that the higher educational institutions have limited our understanding of racism as a political ideology. Hook's writings state that professors deny the truth and teach students to accept racial polarity in the form of white supremacy and sexual polarity in the firm of male dominance. Americans have been taught to accept a version of U.S. history that was created to maintain racial imperialism and sexual imperialism (Hooks, 1988). "For how does one overthrow, change, or even challenge a system that you have been taught to admire, to love, to believe in?"[2]

These words may seem harsh to many professors, students, and Americans in general. But how or why should one change the art canon or any other canon if one believes that the status quo is sufficient? Ultimately, the canon will only change when political and social consciousness is heightened.

[2]Hooks, B. (1988). Racism and feminism in Jones, E. and Olson, G. (Eds.), The Gender Reader, Boston, Mass.: Simon & Schuster, p. 550.

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